

Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 003916

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PINR IS

SUBJECT: ISRAELI DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION

1. EMBASSY'S VIEWS ON FOLLOWING INR PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS
WOULD BE APPRECIATED.

2. BEGIN TEXT. THE ISRAELIS APPEAR TO BE INCREASINGLY
DISTRACTED FROM THE ARAB PEACE OFFENSIVE BY THEIR INTERNAL
POLITICS. YESTERDAY, THE KNESSET OFFICIALLY APPROVED
MAY 17 AS ELECTION DAY. THE SUICIDE OF HOUSING MINISTER
OFER ON JANUARY 3 IS LIKELY TO HAVE A MAJOR NEGATIVE IMPACT
ON RABIN'S CAMPAIGN TO RECEIVE THE LABOR PARTY NOMINATION
FOR PRIME MINISTER IN THE FORTHCOMING GENERAL ELECTION AND
ON THE LABOR PARTY'S ALREADY DECLINING FORTUNES. (THE
LATEST NEWSPAPER POLL, TAKEN BEFORE THE SUICIDE, SHOWS THAT
THE LABOR ALIGNMENT COULD LOSE 20 OF ITS 53 SEATS, WITH
LIKUD RETAINING ITS 36 SEATS AND BECOMING THE LARGEST BLOC
IN THE KNESSET.)

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3. THE OFER CASE HAS PROBABLY ERASED MUCH OF THE GAINS
THAT RABIN ACHIEVED BY THE RESIGNATION OF HIS CABINET, AND
HIS HANDLING OF THE AFFAIR HAS REVIVED HIS REPUTATION
FOR INEPTITUDE. THE FACT THAT OFER WAS A CLOSE ASSOCIATE
OF RABIN, OFTEN CHARGED WITH CARRYING OUT DELICATE

POLITICAL TASKS, MAKES RABIN'S APPARENTLY CALLOUS TREAT-

MENT OF HIM EVEN WORSE IN THE EYES OF NOT ONLY THE DOVES
BUT OTHER LABOR MEMBERS. SHOSHANA ARBELI, A KNESSET
MEMBER REPRESENTING THE AHOUT AVODAH FACTION, WHICH OVER-
WHELMINGLY OPPOSES RABIN'S CHIEF RIVAL, PERES, STATED:
"THEY THREW HIM (OFER) TO THE DOGS. WHAT KIND OF LEADER-
SHIP DOES OUR PARTY HAVE?"

4. LABOR DOVES, WHOSE SUPPORT RABIN MUST HAVE TO BE RE-
NOMINATED, WILL ALSO CALCULATE THAT THE OFER SUICIDE,
COMING ON TOP OF THE RECENT INDICTMENT OF ASHER YADLIN,
RABIN'S CANDIDATE FOR CENTRAL BANK GOVERNOR, ON CHARGES OF
BRIBERY AND FRAUD, WILL DAMAGE SERIOUSLY LABOR'S ELECTORAL
PROSPECTS. IN THIS CONTEXT, THEY WILL HAVE A POTENT
INCENTIVE TO TURN TO PERES. PUBLIC SUSPICION OF CORRUP-
TION IN LABOR, ALREADY STRONG AND STRENGTHENED BY THE
OFER SUICIDE, WILL BE ENORMOUSLY AMPLIFIED BY THE TRIAL.

5. THE YADLIN TRIAL AND THE OFER SUICIDE COULD NOT HAVE
BEEN BETTER TIMED TO BENEFIT LABOR'S OPPONENTS. THE TWO
EVENTS WILL PRECLUDE THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF
LABOR'S ELECTORAL STRATEGY, WHICH AIMS AT BRINGING FOREIGN
POLICY ISSUES TO THE FORE. INSTEAD OF PROJECTING AN IMAGE
OF STATESMANSHIP, LABOR WILL PROJECT AN IMAGE OF CORRUP-
TION. THE NATURAL BENEFICIARIES OF THE OFER SUICIDE WILL
BE THE OPPOSITION LIKUD AND THE NEW PARTIES HEADED BY
FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF YADIN AND WAR HERO SHARON. HOWEVER,
YADIN, WHO, AS THE "MR. CLEAN" OF THE CAMPAIGN, WOULD
ORDINARILY HAVE HOPED TO BENEFIT MOST, MAY DERIVE ONLY
LIMITED ADVANTAGE BECAUSE HIS CLOSE COLLEAGUE AMNON
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RUBENSTEIN HAS HIMSELF BEEN TAINTED BY ALLEGATIONS OF
SCANDAL INVOLVING A FAMILY BUSINESS. END TEXT.
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